

# A Writ of Habeas Corpus

BY ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

## Gray Ghost, Shrewd Malefactor, Apparently Reaches Climax of His Career in Contest With Pelham and Tryon.

IT WAS exactly six days since the Gray Ghost had telephoned that within a week he would kill Pelham with his own hands. Twice motor cars had barely missed running over Pelham. Three times shots had been fired at him. One of them had clipped his hat.

Jerry Tryon, his partner, and Slim Dickenson, his cook-valet-friend, were both equally anxious during this especially trying week. They were convinced that if Pelham remained indoors the Gray Ghost would come to him. And when the criminal should come a score of Tryon operators would be awaiting him.

But their pleas had been unheeded by Pelham.

"Slim," said Pelham, "I'm going out to dinner."

"I got a swell steak in the ice box," said Slim. But his voice was hopeless.

"Then eat it," snapped Pelham.

"What's the big idea?" demanded Slim. "You're not going out without me, are you?"

"I am," declared Pelham. "Everywhere I've gone I've had a group of people with me, and our friend has made only long-range attempts. If I'm alone he'll come close. And that's what I want." He laughed. "But because that's what I want, he'll not make any effort tonight."

The Tryon Agency held title to the whole block in which Pelham's apartment was situated. This was not merely an investment calculated to bring in a certain percentage of return—it was also in the nature of a precautionary measure.

So Pelham had been able to construct various doors and passages which made it possible for him, walking into his bedroom, to appear five minutes later in the doorway of a building fifty yards away.

It was dusk when he slipped quietly into the street. He was recognized at once by an operative of the agency. The man would have followed, but Pelham peremptorily ordered him to remain where he was and darted down a side street.

West of Broadway he picked up a taxi and drove to Edgemont, that gay roadhouse which, well within the city's limits, yet makes one feel that the city has been left behind.

As he progressed peacefully through an excellent dinner he began to feel something ridiculous in his precautions. This was New York, not Corsica, or Sicily, or some other land of the vendetta.

Looking across the river at the twinkling lights of Jersey, watching the moonlight turn the river into dancing silver, hearing the orchestra play the latest waltz, seeing the smiling faces of girls—he managed to bring a temporary sense of security to his strained nerves.

Deliberately he forced himself to regard the past months of the Gray Ghost's renaissance, the past few days of strain, as unrealities, and the present, with its calm and joyous security, as the true strain of reality.

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HERE is in the make-up of every man who may lay claim to being an artist—and if Pelham's profession was not artistic, his methods entitled him to be considered, at least, more imaginative than his fellow craftsmen—something which enables him to disregard the immediate past and the immediate future, and live only in the moment. Pelham could do this. He was quite forgetful of the Gray Ghost, as his hunger satisfied, he lit a cigarette, stirred the sugar in his coffee, and looked about the room.

Presently he realized that the pretty blonde who sat alone, two tables away from him, was eying him.

He had idly noticed her when she first came in, and had seen her insist upon being shown to the table where she now sat. A card, with the word "Reserved" printed upon it, had disappeared from the table almost simultaneously with the transfer of something from the girl's hand to that of the head waiter.

She held up her hand and furtively beckoned to him. He hesitated a moment. Then it seemed to him that it was to him as an individual to whom she wished to speak, and not merely to a well-dressed stranger. So he rose and approached the table at which she sat.

Her face lighted up as he stopped beside her. "Won't you sit down?" she invited him.

"Thank you," said Pelham.

He pulled out a chair, sat down, and looked inquiringly at her. She was even prettier than she had seemed at longer range. For the rest she seemed a well-bred girl whose air of sophistication might well be due to nothing more than the contacts required by the necessities of earning a living. Pelham set her down as connected in some capacity with the theater.

"I suppose you must have a terrible opinion of me," she said.

"I am reserving judgment," smiled Pelham.

Convinced that her mute invitation to join her had not been born of an inclination to flirtation, but had been inspired by some real need, he gave her time to approach the matter whatever it was, in her own way.

It was rather delightful to sit at table with this girl, drinking in through the open windows the soft air of the spring evening.

He suddenly wished to whisper pleasant nothings, and to hear them told to him. But there was something so forced in her tones that he became more than ever convinced that she had had a weightier reason for summoning him.

"You didn't invite me here for idle chatter," he said presently. "Not that I wouldn't be glad if you had. But why did you want me to join you?"

She smiled uncertainly.

"Because tonight I need money," she said, ruefully.

"How much?" asked Pelham.

"Until the waiter gives me the check I will not know," she replied.

She laughed nervously. "I didn't feel like dining at home tonight. This lovely spring evening tempts me out. And it was not until I had finished my dining that I realized I had come here without money. The situation has its embarrassing features."

"Fortunately, the embarrassment need not endure," he said.

"Nor need the loan go long unpaid," she told him.

He waved a deprecating hand.

"Suppose that I had the good fortune to own your acquaintance; in that case there would have been no talk of repayment."

"But those are suppositions," she reminded him. "I can stretch convention so far, but not beyond. If you will pay my check and then come with me to my apartment—it is on 55th street, just off the Drive—I will refund the money."

"Then eat it," snapped Pelham.

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